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ABSTRACT

Most often music radio stations use tip sheets and charts in selecting and scheduling music. To overcome the disadvantages of these methods, some radio stations have begun to use music call-out research. Data are obtained through theatre studies, shopping mall intercepts, mail surveys, telephone surveys, or through a combination of these techniques. Researchers give audiences printed lists of titles, have them listen to "hooks" (short segments of a musical recording played over the phone), or send them sound sheets (flexible disk recordings). Most often, scaled alternative or scaled response questionnaires are used. Scaled alternative items consist of seven alternative phrases arranged along a numerical scale to represent a continuum of the listener's feelings about the music; scaled response items also use a numbered scale, but only the extremes are labeled with terms such as "like-dislike" or "familiar-unfamiliar." In addition to problems validating information obtained from scaled alternative questionnaires, current music research also lacks uniformity in sampling procedures, making cross study generalization difficult. Categorizing audiences according to their listening habits and loyalty to the station would improve this research, though programming would still be more an art than a science. (Examples of questionnaires are included.) (JL)

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MUSIC CALL-OUT RESEARCH:
THE USE BY U.S. RADIO STATIONS
OF RECURRENT SURVEYS OF AUDIENCE TASTES IN MUSIC

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The Nature of Radio¹

"Think for a moment of the last time you can recall listening to radio. Close your eyes and visualize the place and your position in it. Now reach your hand out to touch the volume control of your radio. Did any of you find the radio too far for your hand to reach it?"

This is an exercise the author conducts with his students to illustrate the special attachment listeners develop to radio stations. There are relatively few humans with whom the average person communicates in this near personal space. Those few humans might collectively be labelled, "intimate friends." This special relationship with intimate friends requires an abbreviated sort of verbal communication, a confidential and a mutual trust that follows from each knowing what to expect of the other.

Successful radio stations emulate these features of an intimate friend. Personalities, for example, use a soft voice, speak very close to their microphones and use the informal idioms of intimacy. Music and other program elements are carefully planned and executed with discipline, so that a consistent personality is presented to the audience by the station.

As might be expected, the stations most effective at establishing this appropriate relationship with their audiences are rewarded with listener loyalty and greater time spent listening by those audiences.

Tip Sheets and Charts

In the early days of music radio - and in many stations today - tip sheets and charts guide the programmer to some extent in selecting and scheduling music. Charts such as those in Billboard and other trade

publications report the popularity of selections in various musical categories. Over the years the formulas for assessing relative popularity have included record sales, juke box plays and opinions of various music programmers.

Tip sheets typically rely upon the judgment of some well-known programmer. In addition, they may poll the frequency of play of various selections on radio stations specializing in the category of music reported.

Tip sheets and charts can be very helpful to a programmer, although most are not based upon the manifest tastes and preferences of listeners in the radio stations own community.

Music Call-Out Research

This shortcoming of tip sheets and charts provided a reason for the latest aid to radio music programming - music call-out research.

As to the number of stations actively involved in music research, no authoritative figures are available. A reasonable estimate, however, may be that about one thousand of the nation's more than nine thousand AM and FM stations may be supported by music research. The research may be conducted by the station staff, by local market research firms, by national radio research firms and by cooperative efforts of several stations with a programming consultant.

Samples. Data for these studies may be collected from listeners who have made requests for particular songs, from a general sample of radio listeners in the community or from a pre-screened sample of listeners to a particular category of music. Data may be collected in theater sessions, shopping mall intercepts, mail surveys and telephone interviewing as well as in combinations of these methods.

Theater Studies. In theater studies groups of one hundred or more respondents are invited to a theater where short segments or "hooks" of musical selections are played. The respondents complete a questionnaire in which they respond to each selection.

Shopping Mall Intercepts. Shoppers are interrupted as they move through a mall. After it is determined that a respondent listens to radio music of the category being studied, the "hooks" are presented by headphone, and responses collected on an appropriate questionnaire.

Mail Surveys. Samples are sent a list of songs identified by title, most familiar line, performing group and/or album title. Respondents indicate their opinions and preferences on a questionnaire which is then returned to the researcher in a self-addressed, stamped envelope. In some cases, a set of "hooks" is mailed as a sound sheet (a flexible plastic disk recording) with respondents recording reactions on a printed questionnaire.

Telephone Surveys. In this case respondents are contacted by telephone. "Hooks" of musical selections are played over the telephone circuit to the respondent, and reactions recorded by the interviewer.

Combinations. Mail surveys can be improved, particularly with higher levels of respondent cooperation, by contacting the intended recipient of a mail survey, first by telephone. In addition, respondents to either mail or telephone surveys may be asked to dial a telephone answering machine which will play the "hooks" of musical selections being studied.

Sometimes telephone surveys will be conducted on a weekly or semi-weekly basis to study recent recordings with "oldies" or "standards" being tested from one to four times per year by mail or theater methods.

Some radio programming consultants encourage their stations in various markets to conduct research using the same "hooks" and questionnaires. The resulting data can then be pooled across the stations yielding more reliable measures of response to the music involved.

Presenting the Music

Lists. In mail surveys and in intercept studies it is possible to present the music to be judged by the respondent as a printed list. Such lists are useful, of course, only to the extent the printed list evokes vivid memories of the music itself. Therefore lists cannot be used unless the music being studied is already familiar. When the music listed is not familiar, respondents are more likely to provide their most favorable responses to the music of their favorite artists, even though they do not know at all the particular song listed.

"Hooks". A "hook" is a short segment of a longer musical recording used to represent the longer selection in music research. In selecting a "hook" the researcher tries to find the most familiar line of the musical selection, one with the same mood and variety of instruments by which the song as a whole is characterized. The typical length of a "hook" is 8 - 15 seconds. As the same musical selection is studied in subsequent survey periods the same hook is used. The set of "hooks" examined during one particular study may be recorded onto an audiocassette for high fidelity presentation in a theater study or intercept study. Or the cassette may be played down a telephone line or by a telephone answering machine in a telephone interview study.

Sound sheets. The flexible disk recordings are prepared by a disk pressing company...typically with a four to six week delay. This delay

makes the sound sheet an impractical method for studying recent releases. The quality of reproduction, on the other hand, is much better than music played down a phone line.

Questionnaires

There are differences in music research questionnaires primarily in the form in which respondent's reactions are sought. The two principal varieties of questionnaire in general use in this research will be labelled scaled alternative and scaled response.

Typical scaled alternative items consist of seven alternative phrases arranged along a numerical scale to represent what the researcher feels is a continuum of feelings a listener can have about music. This is one example. After hearing a musical selection the respondent would be asked to select the one of the seven alternatives closest to his/her feelings about the music.

1. Never heard of it.
2. Dislike it strongly.
3. Dislike it moderately.
4. Don't care.
5. Tired of it.
6. Like it.
7. My favorite record.²

The various alternative responses can be grouped to form index figures like these:

Positive Acceptance - number of respondents checking "like it" or "my favorite record", divided by total number of respondents.

Tolerance - number of respondents checking "like it" or "my favorite record" divided by number of respondents checking "dislike it strongly" or "dislike it moderately".³

Typical scaled response items for radio music questionnaires include these:

DISLIKE		LIKE
1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9

UNFAMILIAR		FAMILIAR
1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9

The respondent indicates with an X or check where along each continuum his reactions to a musical selection fall.

Comparison of Scaled Alternative and Scaled Response Items. The scaled response items are preferable from a data stability point of view. They have been used in music research and in advertising copy research for a number of years. With small samples, the scales give good discrimination among the reactions to musical selections.

The scaled alternative items have considerable intuitive appeal, but attempts to validate the labels involved have shown that the labels are not used in the same way by respondents in various parts of the country.⁴

Problems in Contemporary Music Studies

The validity question raised above is one of the serious yet unaddressed problems faced by stations using music research.

The problem is complicated by the number of programming consultants committed to scaled alternative responses. Whenever good information becomes available on validity and reliability of scales alternative questionnaires, necessary changes are likely to be slow in developing.

Another significant problem is the absence of uniformity in sampling procedures, making it very difficult to generalize from one study to another. Certainly music requestors and fan organizations should not be used at all as a source of respondents.

It would be good advice to screen random samples of the listening public to identify light, medium and heavy listeners, as well as relative preference for local radio stations. It should be important to radio programmers to identify the categories of listeners upon which program strategy must be based. And especially (1) the core of loyal listeners to the station and (2) those who occasionally tune to the station and hence might be persuaded to spend more time listening to the station.

Finally it must be observed that none of this research relieves the programmer from the necessity of responding to the audience more as an artist than as a scientist. At its best music research will be an imperfect system for planning. The order in which selections are played, the relevance and relative distribution of various categories of music, the way elements are pieced together are also important contributors to station popularity today and likely to remain so in the future.

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Figure 1. Example of a Mail Questionnaire

Midwest Research

110 Main St.

Yourtown

Dear Ms. Brown;

I enjoyed very much meeting you on the phone today. And I am very pleased that you will be helping us with our study of radio music in Yourtown. As I explained to you on the telephone, your telephone number was selected scientifically in order to give us a group of people who would ideally represent the city. That means that you and each of the others in our study are very important.

The questionnaire attached should explain itself, but if you do have some questions, please call me at _____ any evening of the week.

You should receive my letter and the questionnaire by Wednesday. Fill it out sometime Wednesday or Thursday. I will call you on Thursday evening, as we agreed to get your answers to the questionnaire. I'll just have you read me the blanks you fill in. Thank you so much for helping us to try to bring better music listening to Yourtown.

Sincerely,

Judy Smith

Figure 1 (continued)

QUESTIONNAIRE—MUSIC STUDY OF YOURTOWN—Date CIRCLE ANSWERS

To which of the following age categories do you belong? (1) 12-17
(2) 18-34
(3) 35-49
(4) 49-64
(5) 65+

At which of these times are you most likely to be listening to the radio?
(1) 6-10 am weekdays
(2) 10 am - 3 pm weekdays
(3) 3 pm - 7 pm weekdays
(4) 7 pm - midnight week-nights

Which are your favorite stations for listening to music?
(1) AAAA
(2) BBBB
(3) CCCC
(4) DDDD
(5) EEEE

CHECK OFF HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT EACH OF THE PIECES OF MUSIC NAMED BELOW
BY PUTTING YOUR CHECK MARK () IN ONE OF THE BOXES FOLLOWING EACH
PIECE.

SELECTION

A
B
C
D
E
F
X
Y

1) Never really heard of it	2) Dislike it strongly	3) Dislike it moderately	4) Don't care	5) Tired of it	6) Like it	7) My favorite record
()	()	()	()	()	()	()
()	()	()	()	()	()	()
()	()	()	()	()	()	()
()	()	()	()	()	()	()
()	()	()	()	()	()	()
()	()	()	()	()	()	()
()	()	()	()	()	()	()
()	()	()	()	()	()	()

Thanks for your help!!!

Figure 2. An Interview Schedule

XXXX Radio Music Survey - Week of _____

Telephone Number _____

Time of first attempt _____

Time of second attempt _____

Time of third attempt _____

Good evening. This is _____ of Midwest Research in Yourtown. We are conducting a study of radio listening. Is there a young man between the ages of twelve and seventeen in your home who listens to the radio?

Yes _____
No _____

IF NO Is there a young woman in your home between the ages of twelve and seventeen who listens to the radio?

Yes _____
No _____

IF NO TERMINATE.

May I speak to him/her?

Yes _____
No _____

IF NO, Is there a time I can call again to reach him/her? Time _____
No _____

IF NO GET REASON AND TERMINATE.

Do you listen to the radio most days?

Yes _____
No _____

IF NO TERMINATE.

What are your favorite radio stations? A__ B__ C__ D__ (ONLY FOUR)

Which station are you most likely tuned to during these times? M-F 6-10 am _____

M-F 10-3 am _____

M-F 3-7 pm _____

M-F 7-Midni _____

Saturdays _____

Sundays _____

Give me some examples of your favorite musical performers:

Now I want to play some short pieces of music for you. After each

Figure 2 (continued)

piece I would like you to tell me how familiar the music is on a scale of one to five with one being the least familiar and five being the most familiar. Then I will ask you to tell me how much you like the music also on a scale of one to five with one being least liked and five being most liked. All right, here is the first musical selection. (PROMPT ON SCALES IF NEEDED).

SELECTION	Familiar					Liked				
	Least 1	2	3	4	Most 5	Least 1	2	3	4	Most 5
A										
B										
C										
D										
E										
F										
G										
Only a few more now.										
H										
I										
J										

That's the last selection I have to play for you. By the way, I wonder if you know any of the slogans of the radio stations here in town. Can you tell me the slogan and the station?

SLOGAN

STATION

Thank you very much for helping. HANG UP.